Not Milk?

You don’t have to skimp on calcium just because you’re lactose intolerant.

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Get that queasy feeling when you consume dairy? You’re not alone. According to studies, nearly all African Americans have some degree of lactose intolerance (it’s a gene thing), which makes it difficult to enjoy the richest sources of calcium, such as milk, cheese and ice cream. So perhaps it’s no wonder that about 86 percent of blacks get only half the recommended daily amount of calcium, which keeps bones strong and prevents osteoporosis (a decrease in bone mass and density that can occur with age). While it’s true that we generally have higher bone density and lower risk for osteoporosis, this natural advantage decreases with age.

If only we could avoid bloating, flatulence and discomfort, 85 percent of us say we’d consume more calcium-rich dairy, according to a 2004 study by NPD Foodworld, a Rosemont, Ill.–based nutrition and dieting marketing group. But there are degrees of lactose intolerance, and people may be more “tolerant” than they think. “Even people who consider themselves severely lactose intolerant can usually enjoy one to two cups of milk or other dairy over the course of a day as long as it’s taken in small doses and with food,” says lead researcher and gastroenterologist Michael Levitt, MD.

If milk ain’t your thing, certain dairy products have less lactose, including Swiss, cheddar and cottage cheeses (just watch the fat content in those bad boys). Calcium-fortified orange juice, fish with edible bones (like canned salmon and sardines) and greens like kale and broccoli are also calcium-rich. Check out www.calciuminfo.com for a list of alternatives to dairy so you can make sure that your bones—and your stomach—stay strong.

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